

SOCIAL REPRESENTATION RESEARCH: USES, IMPORTANCE & RELATIONSHIP TO ETHNOGRAPHY- AND NETNOGRAPHY-BASED MARKETING 'COMMUNITIES'

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE OF PAPER

This paper presents for marketing educators who otherwise might not be familiar (1) the basic concepts of social representation research (SRR) concepts (the study of what cultural members think of certain objects, products or brands, and which values they associate with them and which norms they follow in using them, Penz 2006); (2) its uses and applications; (3) its deviates such as alternative representation; (4) its relationship to both ethnography (the study of off-line 'communities' such as the Air Stream, TrailManor, Samsung, 'Burning Man,' Harley Davidson and Apple and other so-called off-line 'communities') and netnography (as defined by Kozinets 2002 to mean ethnography research designed specifically to study consumer behavior of online (or digital-connected) consumers and communities -- for example the study 'communities' such as Facebook, Twitter, Amazon's Kindle e-book and other on-line 'communities'); and, (5) an explanation of the growing importance of SRR as a marketing segmentation variable. This paper is not intended to advance the theory of social representation research. For those interested in such advancement we refer them to works by Schouten and Koenig (2002), Muniz, Schau, and Arnould (2009); Craig and Douglas, 2001; Penz, 2006; and Bauer and Gaskell, 1999); and others.

IMPORTANCE OF SRR AND PRODUCT/BRAND COMMUNITIES

In the general, a brand or product community is defined as being a specialized, non-geographic bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand or product or other object (Muniz, Jr. and O'Guinn, 2001). The use of SRR to study brand communities is important to today's marketers' understanding of a culture's or group's values, norms and behaviors regarding some marketing phenomenon (product, service, or object) and can be used for a diversity of scopes of research ranging from sub-cultural to global. Additionally, such study has important implications for many other fields such as management and information systems.

RELEVANCE TO MARKETERS

Reviewers found this paper on SRR, a new research tool (to American professors) interesting and educational with useful suggestions for those might like to get involved in, what might be new to them, SRR methodology. Discussions of brand communities are relatively new and coverage has just recently begun to appear in consumer behavior texts. However, much research is needed to elaborate on (1) how marketing as a discipline has come to know what we know about brand cultures, (2) to ascertain the degree of attention that is given to building and understanding brand communities in marketing education texts, and (2) the affect of brand community phenomena on the practice of marketing and relevance of these findings to practitioners and educators alike.

This paper introduces and integrates (and could have done so to a greater extent) European literature on SRR with that which US marketing educators most often see, North American research on (1) 'social constructivist' research (the co-creation of brand/product meanings by the brand members themselves as they assign them, not as marketers attempt to dictate them); (2) consumer culture theory (CCT) research (studies of online and off-line brand communities where members are physically co-present if only temporarily); and, (3) social practice research (the process of collective value creation within brand communities) as addressed in select journals such as Journal of Marketing (Schoeten and Koenig 2002, Muniz, Schau and Arnould 2009, and Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki and Wilnet 2010); Journal of Consumer Research (Arnould and Thompson 2005); Journal of Consumer Culture (Cook 2008); International Marketing Review (Penz 2006); International Journal of Sports Management and Marketing (Bodet, Meurgey and Lacassagne 2009); and others, as well as in select book formats such as Schroeder and Salzer-Morlin's Brand Culture, Routledge, 2006; and Kalman's Brand Communities, Marketing and Media, Terrella Media, Inc. 2005; and others.

References Available on Request